

Oct. 13, '76

Dear Philip,

I tried to get your address for some time after I heard you have left Bangkok. When I have met people, even long ago, I do not forget them, I have accumulated this.

Sarah from England and Jenni from Adelaide stayed with me for three days and we discussed Dhamma in daily life. We agreed that it is helpful to be home again. It is very good to learn and listen in Bangkok, and then it is time to go home. Then comes the time to check what we have learnt, does it really help us in daily life? Also, we are so used to terms like nāma and rūpa and then we find it a very hard task to explain realities in very, very simple language. Then we can check ourselves whether we just copied what we learnt, without experiencing it ourselves, or whether the Dhamma is our daily life and we can put it in the most simple language. Now the time has come for me to realize this, since this month conditions are such that there are several lectures. But it is helpful. I hope you can go home soon to America. But even being in Switzerland is a good experience. We can learn from these experiences.

I always stressed so much: being with the right people, listening is so important. It is important, but even that, I think everything, we can exaggerate, and then there is not the Middle Way. Being with the right people can become attachment, and we forget that, as the Buddha said, you have to develop the Path yourself, nobody else can do it for you. I almost forgot that. It is time to go home.

It is not difficult to talk in Abhidhamma terms, but it is difficult to talk in very simple language. Then it appears how little we have experienced ourselves of the realities the Buddha taught.

This experience in Holland is also a reminder for me to better realize: what is experienced now, without trying to find out: is it nāma or is it rūpa? We can become so tired of nāma and rūpa, that we would like to forget about it. The only thing we have no doubts about is what is experienced now. That is the blessing of the Buddha's teaching. We can have lots of doubts, about rebirth, about the future, about the past, but when we experience what presents itself now: no doubt. I do not doubt hardness presenting itself now, even though this now is not yet very precise. At least it is a beginning. And then: kusala, what is good for you; and akusala, what is not good for you. Nobody else has to tell us what is kusala and what akusala, we can find out ourselves these different moments after the Buddha has explained it so clearly. When I first learnt about Buddhism, it was quite a revelation for me to know the different moments of attachment and unselfish love, and how they arise closely one after the other. Not that I know the different moments precisely, but we can begin to know them, and even a beginning is so very helpful. A moment of kusala is a kind of relaxation, you feel free, even a short moment

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and it is so different from akusala which has something rigid, and then you are enslaved, not free. We can start to know the differences and it is so helpful, nobody else can take this knowledge away from us. And we have no doubts about these things we can immediately experience, no matter what other people tell us. The T.V. man put me quite nasty questions, like: fancy if everything is an illusion. Well, even the thinking about this is only a kind of thinking, that is all, that is all thinking about it is a kind of thinking, and there are so many kinds of thinking, nobody in the world can convince me that it is not so.

This can help us very much in life not to despair. When we despair, they are only some kinds of thoughts. We can think of so many things, some true, some nonsense and imagination. The wonderful thing the Buddha taught is that thinking is a reality, and it is fleeting, so many thoughts in a day. What we think can be names, concepts, lots of funny ideas, it can be anything. But I find people are not used to this approach. I would like to give an example. We look at T.V. and we are quite absorbed in what we see, but people forget to get to know what happens inside us: the many different emotions, feelings, thoughts, reminiscences. And that is the most important to know. So likewise: the moments of thinking are important to know, the what we think is not real anyway, why attach such importance to it?

And then we will find out that we cannot control our thoughts. I remember once a question you asked me about this. Do not try to control, it drives you to despair. The Buddha taught: know the different moments, you cannot control what arises, it has arisen anyway. It is a good experience if you feel desperate because you cannot control, it proves reality to you. I just read about the Thera Sappadāsa (Thera-gathā 215), who tried to control his thoughts and feelings, and it drove him to utter despair, he wanted to commit suicide. How real are these experiences of men and women in the Buddha's time. I am amazed, the more I read them. And then there was a turning point: he realized that he could not control anything, they are not self, anatta, arising because of their own conditions, their own causes, rooted in the past. Because how we were long ago has influence on how we are today. Lots of lobha and dosa in the past conditions lots of lobha and dosa now. The Thera stopped trying to control his thoughts but realized them as they are, since this is the only thing that we can do. And thus he attained arahatship, just before it was almost too late. When we stop to control, but just realize different moments which present themselves, it is a kind of relief, of relaxation, of freedom. Here is the verse:

Full five and twenty years have passed since I
had left the world and in the Order lived,
And yet not for one fingersnap of time
Had I found peace (and sanity) of mind.
Intent and single vision ne'er I won,

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Distraught and harassed by desires of sense;
In tears, wringing my hands, I left the lodge.
Nay now I'll take a knife or else—For what
Is life to me? And how can such as I,
Who by my life the training have denied,
Do better than set term to it and die?
So then I came and with a razor sat me down
Upon my couch. And now the blade was drawn
Across my throat to cut the artery....
When lo! in me arose the deeper thought:
Attention to the fact and to the cause.
The misery of it all was manifest;
Distaste, indifference the mind possessed,
And so my heart was set at liberty!
O see the seemly order of the Dhamma!
The Threefold Wisdom have I made my own,
And all the Buddha bids us do is done.

() Don't regret you disrobed; as Jonathan once wrote to Ann, there
is no right or wrong decision, that is, in this sense that we worry
about the outcome we cannot control anyway. How do we know the future,
and in the meantime the present moment flies by. Now it is time to go
home and I hope you can, soon. Write to me when you feel like it,
if you don't I understand.

Warmest wishes,

Nina